

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



22 October 2008

Dr A Williams
Principal
West Suffolk College
Out Risbygate
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP33 3RL

Dear Dr Williams

Ofsted survey: good practice in capturing the user voice

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 October 2008 to look at work on capturing the user voice. I am particularly grateful to the managers and teaching staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and for giving up their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to both the past and present students who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff, student governors, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observations of faculty student rep meetings.

Features of good practice observed

- The development of a highly inclusive college culture that actively promotes an agenda of respect, valuing individuals, and providing high quality support, enabling learners to contribute their views freely and openly.
- A high degree of importance is placed on developing the student voice to enhance students' learning experience by the principal, senior managers and governors.
- Governors demonstrate a strong commitment and involvement in listening to learners' views. Governors regularly attend student council meetings, student conferences and seminars. The governing body are developing methods to help them gain a better understanding of what life is like as a student at West Suffolk College. This is contributing effectively to their overall monitoring of the college's performance.

- The college has a well-established and formalised system of student representatives which is used successfully as a conduit for collating and responding to student views throughout the year.
- Clear targets are set for student satisfaction surveys as part of the college's very effective quality assurance processes. Students' feedback is reviewed in conjunction with course data to more accurately gauge course performance. The college analyses student questionnaires effectively to determine key issues and plan prompt action to best address any student concerns as an integral part of course review.
- The college gives growing prominence to the wider 'user voice' through its self-assessment process and reports, including feedback from students, parents and employers.

Areas for development

- To continue to develop systems which allow different groups of learners, including more vulnerable groups, to more effectively share their views and ideas.
- Broaden the range of opportunities for students to contribute their ideas and influence the work of the college at a more strategic level.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the user voice in the college.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection and/or desk monitoring activity.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins
Her Majesty's Inspector